

Interagency Cooperation With Other Agencies and Entities

Coordination with Education Officials

Goals to Provide Quality, Individualized Services

The Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) has continued to work cooperatively with local school districts, the Department of Education and Cultural Affairs, parent/student transition groups, South Dakota's Systems Change Project and the Department of Labor to provide vocational rehabilitation services to eligible students as they transition from school to the adult world. The goals of the agencies include provision of quality, individualized services to students with disabilities and to facilitate the transition into adulthood smoothly.

Rehabilitation counselors occasionally face barriers when providing services to students with disabilities. At times, potentially eligible students are not referred to SBVI in time for the transition services to be done smoothly and thoroughly. Counselors are removing those barriers by continuing to work with special education teachers and directors to make them aware of what vocational rehabilitation services can be offered to the students and to help them understand eligibility criteria. In response to public comments concerning transition service issues, the Division of SBVI will continue to address transition as a priority.

For FFY 98, there were a total of 181 individuals referred to SBVI with 22 under the age of twenty. This number is consistent with referrals from prior years.

Accomplishments in consumer services during the past year

The Division has accomplished a number of improvements in the provision of services to students with disabilities during the past year:

- * Traditionally, students with disabilities have been unable to obtain work experience while in high school. A cooperative agreement between the Divisions of Rehabilitation Services and Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired, Department of Labor, and the local education agencies implemented "Project Skills" to address this need. The Project Skills program provides paid work experience for approximately 200 students with disabilities. The students receive job placement services, job coaching, employment skills training, and follow along services in community businesses.
- * Through the Dakota Works System Change Grant, the Divisions have funded system initiative grants to educational cooperatives to provide employment preparation services to students. A model project was completed this year in which the students received job shadowing, career assessment, and interview skills training.
- * Students eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation Services will have a completed IPE prior to graduating from high school.
- * The Division of SBVI has entered into a cooperative agreement with the SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired to support a transition specialist. This position serves blind and visually impaired students in school districts on a statewide basis. The position works with district offices to coordinate training and education of special education directors and teachers.

- * Through the Supported Employment and Transition System Change projects, four technical assistants are regionally located throughout the state to assist vocational rehabilitation counselors, school personnel, state agencies, adult service providers, consumer organizations, students with disabilities and their family members in supported employment and transition services.
- * Summer programs have been established at the SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (School) and the SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind (SDRC) for high school students who are blind or visually impaired. These week long programs offer the students an opportunity to learn about assistive technology applications and skills of blindness. Staff from the School and SDRC provide training and supervision to students participating in the programs.

Improved coordination of services between agencies

The Division has been working internally, as well as with other agencies, to facilitate the transition of students who are receiving special education services. The following activities have been conducted to enhance coordination and service delivery:

- * Special education staff from the school districts were invited to attend Division training. The Mid-Winter training session held in March, 1999 titled "Substance Abuse and Vocational Rehabilitation" was well attended by special education providers. Future Division sponsored training will be announced to special education providers.
- * The Division of Rehabilitation Services, Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired, Dakota Works System Change Grant, South Dakota Rehabilitation Association, and Association for Persons in Supported Employment jointly supported a fall conference that focused on transition. The conference facilitated the cross training of teachers and adult service providers regarding their programs and development of collaboration and teambuilding between schools and adult services.
- * The Division of SBVI is participating in a cooperative agreement with the Department of Labor which will increase staff's access to job announcements from Job Service offices.
- * The Department of Human Services, the Department of Education and Cultural Affairs, the Department of Labor and the Department of Social Services have developed a cooperative agreement concerning Transition Services for Youth with Disabilities. The agreement presents a common policy and conceptual framework for addressing interagency transition planning at the local level, thus insuring that youth with disabilities have access to the services and resources needed to enter adult life (and the world of work) successfully.
- * The first annual "Youth Leadership Forum" is being jointly sponsored by; the Department of Human Services, the Divisions of DRS and SBVI, the Division of Special Education, the Transition Systems Change Project, the Statewide Independent Living Council, and the Boards of DRS and SBVI. An initiative of the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, this week long seminar is intended to prepare high school age youth to be community leaders. All entities have been

involved in planning the program, interviewing students, interviewing project staff and funding program activities.

Plans to facilitate transition services of students receiving special education services

The Division continues to explore and expand transition services available to students with disabilities. The quality, as well as the quantity of services have increased over the last year and will continue to do so. The Division of SBVI is committed to provide quality services in order to provide smooth and thorough transitions into the adult world. Key activities to implement this commitment include:

- * Cooperating state agencies will share with each other data on the needs of students with disabilities and the outcomes of the services and programs.
- * Cooperating agencies will encourage staff to take part in training sponsored by other cooperating agencies.
- * Placement teams are composed of student, parents/guardians, school personnel, community agency service providers, and other appropriate individuals. The teams' purposes are to develop the IEP, assign service responsibilities, implement IEP, and determine case management responsibilities.
- * Through four pilot sites, designate results of activities and initiatives through out the state.
- * Through the Transition System Change Project, specialized training will be provided to school personnel to provide quality employment services for students with disabilities.
- * Through the Transition System Change Project, specialized training will be provided to educators/parents on transition. The focus of the training is for them to better understand the transition from school to post school life and how to access these services.
- * Through the Transition System Change Project and Colorado State University, a self determination project will be developed. The project will develop curriculums to help students to conduct their own IEP meetings and learn how to actively advocate for themselves.

Outreach to identify students with disabilities who are not receiving special education services

The Division continues to identify and work with students with disabilities who are not receiving special education services. At times some of these students are not being referred to the local VR counselor so special efforts are planned to obtain referrals on these students. These efforts consist of:

- * Counselors contact school counselors and 504 coordinators on a regular basis in an attempt to identify and meet with these students.
- * Counselors inform school staff what services are available to students with disabilities and eligibility requirements. Counselors then follow up on referral in a timely fashion in order to determine eligibility prior to graduation.

- * Counselors and other Division staff attend interagency meetings in order to inform other service organizations about vocational rehabilitation services and obtain referrals of these students.
- * The Division will continue funding Project Skills through the next year to include serving students with disabilities who are not receiving special education services.
- * The Division will explore possibilities of doing cooperative agreements with local school systems for employment services.
- * The Division will continue working with the School for the Blind and Visually Impaired to employ a statewide transition specialist for coordination of transition services for students who are blind. This position is responsible for identification of students, coordination of services between the School for the Blind and Visually Impaired regional representatives, local school districts and vocational rehabilitation counselors specializing in blindness related services.

Roles and Responsibilities

The South Dakota Cooperative Agreement Concerning Transition Services for Youth With Disabilities, was effective beginning May 6, 1997. This agreement includes the following South Dakota entities: Office of Special Education, Division of Workforce and Career Preparation, Division of Mental Health, Division of Developmental Disabilities, Division of Rehabilitation Services, Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired, Department of Labor and Department of Social Services.

The agreement identifies each agency's roles and responsibilities including:

- * Consultation and technical assistance to assist in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including vocation rehabilitation services;
- * Transition planning by personnel of the division and school district personnel;
- * Roles and responsibilities of each agency including State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services;
- * Financial responsibilities;
- * Procedures for outreach and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.

During FFY 2000 this agreement will be reviewed and renewed. The agreement will include additional agencies, fill in the gaps of missing services and strengthen the implementation efforts of the agreement. The Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired and public input will be included in the development of the new agreement.